

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 127
INFO AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY QUITO
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
DIA WASHDC
USCINCSO J2 QUARRY HTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LA PAZ 2606

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, BL
SUBJ: PROSPECTS FOR BOLIVIAN ELECTIONS DIMINISH

REF: LA PAZ 2543

1. SUMMARY: BOLIVIAN POLITICS FOLLOWED ITS USUAL ZIG-ZAG COURSE DURING THE LAST WEEK, AND THE PROSPECTS THAT ELECTIONS WILL OCCUR IN JULY 1978 SIGNIFICANTLY DIMINISHED. ON THE ONE HAND PRESIDENT BANZER TOLD HIS HAND PICKED CANDIDATE JUAN PEREDA THAT HE INTENDS TO RECOMMEND TO THE BOLIVIAN ARMED FORCES ON APRIL 3 THAT ELECTIONS BE POSTPONED AND A MILITARY JUNTA BE ESTABLISHED TO RULE THE COUNTRY. PEREDA, WHOSE MORALE WAS ALREADY SAGGING, APPEARED READY TO THROW IN THE TOWEL, BUT HIS CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATION HAS PERSUADED HIM TO STAY IN THE RACE AS LONG AS POSSIBLE AND TO MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR BANZER TO EITHER POSTPONE ELECTIONS OR DUMP PEREDA. PEREDA TOLD THE PRESS ON MARCH 29 THAT HE WOULD NOT RESIGN AS CANDIDATE AND HIS CAMPAIGN COALITION ISSUED A STATEMENT IMPLYING THAT PEREDA AND BANZER TOGETHER WOULD CARRY FORWARD WITH THE MARCH TO DEMOCRACY.
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BANZER HIMSELF IS DISSIMULATING, PUBLICLY ANNOUNCING THAT THE ELECTIONS WILL OCCUR AND THAT HE, BANZER, WILL NOT BE A CANDIDATE. BANZER ALSO TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT HE FAVORS CONTINUING THE ELECTION TIMETABLE BUT HE IS CONCERNED ABOUT THE CANDIDACY OF RETIRED DEFENSE MINISTER RENE BERNAL CAUSING A SPLIT IN THE MILITARY.

WHAT BANZER'S END GAME WILL BE IS STILL NOT CERTAIN. IT IS HIS STYLE TO PURSUE SEVERAL POSSIBLE COURSES AND SELECT HIS FINAL POSITION

AT THE LAST MOMENT. WHAT IS CLEAR IS THAT THERE IS A RAPIDLY WIDENING DIVISION BETWEEN BANZER AND PEREDA AND THE PEREDA FORCES ARE CONVINCED THAT BANZER FAVORS DUMPING PEREDA AND RETAINING POWER HIMSELF.

WHILE THE BOLIVIAN MILITARY, PARTICULARLY THE ARMY, HAVE BEEN COOL ALL ALONG TO PEREDA'S CANDIDACY, AT THE SAME TIME THERE SEEMS TO BE MILITARY SUPPORT FOR ELECTIONS, EITHER IN JULY OR AT SOME REASONABLE LATER DATE. HOW MUCH SUPPORT THERE IS AT THIS POINT IS CONJECTURABLE. UNTIL RECENTLY BANZER HAS DEMONSTRATED AN ABILITY TO MANEUVER THE MILITARY TO HIS OWN TUNE. OBVIOUSLY WHAT POSITION HE REFLECTS AT THE MEETING WHICH BEGINS ON APRIL 3 WILL BE MAJOR FACTOR IN WHETHER THE ELECTION PLAN AND THE PEREDA CANDIDACY SURVIVES. BUT BANZER HAS ALSO BEEN SLOWLY LOSING HIS DOMINATION OF THE ARMED FORCES AND THE OUTCOME IS NOT CERTAIN. THE LIKELIHOOD IS HOWEVER THAT PEREDA WILL BE DUMPED AND THE JULY 9 ELECTION DATE WITH HIM.
END SUMMARY.

2. IN THE PAST 24 HOURS, BOTH PRESIDENT BANZER AND HIS HAND-PICKED PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE JUAN PERDA HAVE TRIED TO DISPEL PERSISTENT RUMORS AND REPORTS THAT THER WILL SOON BE CHANGES IN CONFIDENTIAL

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BOLIVIA'S POLITICAL SCHEME. IN A COMMUNIQUE RELEASED ON MARCH 29, BANZER'S PRESS SECRETARY REITERATED THAT BANZER WOULD NOT BECOME A CANDIDATE FOR THE PRESIDENCY, DISMISSING REPORTS THAT HE WOULD BE SO PROCLAIMED AT A CIVIC RALLY IN SANTA CRUZ ON MARCH 31 AS A COMBINATION OF "RUMOR, INTRIGUE AND DISTORTION." THE COMMUNIQUE WENT ON TO SAY THAT SUCH REPORTS WERE DESIGNED TO DIVIDE THE ARMED FORCES AND THE RURAL SECTOR AND TO SOW CONFUSION AMONG THE PUBLIC.

3. IN A PARRALLEL EFFORT, PEREDA MET WITH THE PRESS ON MARCH 29 AND STOUTLY DENIED RUMORS THAT HE HAD DECIDED TO RENOUNCE HIS CANDIDACY. PEREDA SAID THERE WOULD BE NO REASON FOR HIM TO DROP OUT OF THE RACE, AND THAT HE AND HIS NACIONALIST PEOPLE'S UNION (UNP) COALITION WERE STRONG DEFENDERS OF THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS. THE FOLLOWING DAY, THE UNP PUT OUT FULL PAGE NEWSPAPER ADS ANNOUNCING THAT, WITH "BANZER, PEREDA AND THE ARMED FORCES", THEY REMAINED COMMITTED TO DEMOCRACY.

4. WHAT'S REALLY HAPPENING? QUITE OBVIOUSLY, THERE IS SUBSTANCE BEHIND THE WIDESPREAD REPORTS THAT BANZER MAY BE CONSIDERING CANCELLATION OR POSTPONEMENT OF THE ELECTIONS AND THAT PEREDA MIGHT RENOUNCE HIS CANDIDACY:

-- A DISTRAUGHT PEREDA TOLD THE AMBASSADOR ON THE EVENING OF MARCH 28 THAT HE WAS FED UP WITH BANZER'S "VACILLATION" AND LACK OF SUPPORT; THAT HE FEARED BANZER WAS MANEUVERING TO POSTPONE THE ELECTIONS; AND THAT HE WOULD DENOUNCE HIS CANDIDACY IF SUCH A DECISION WERE MADE.

--UNKNOWN TO HIS CAMPAIGN STAFF, PEREDA APPLIED FOR A US NONIMMIGRANT VISA ON MARCH 28; PEREDA EXPLAINED TO THE AMBASSADOR HE PLANNED TO TAKE A STATESIDE VACATION IF HE DECIDED TO DROP OUT OF THE RACE.

-- BANZER WILL MEET WITH TOP-LEVEL SERVICE COMMANDERS ON APRIL 3 TO DECIDE WHETHER TO PROCEED WITH ELECTIONS--AND THE CONFIDENTIAL

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PEREDA CANDIDACY--AS ORIGINALLY CONTEMPLATED.

-- WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE THREE ARMED SERVICE COMMANDERS AND CHIEF OF STAFF VICTOR GONZALES MET DURING THE MORNING OF MARCH 28 TO DISCUSS THE POLITICAL SITUATION. THEY REPORTEDLY CONCLUDED THAT THE BERNAL CANDIDACY POSED A SERIOUS THREAT TO THE STABILITY OF THE NATION. GONZALES AND VILLAPANDO REPORTEDLY CALLED ON BERNAL THAT DAY AND ASKED HIM TO DROP HIS PRESIDENTIAL BID; BERNAL REFUSED.

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USCINCO J2 QUARRY HEIGHTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 LA PAZ 2606

-- IN A CONVERSATION WITH THE AMBASSADOR ON MARCH 30, BANZER EXPRESSED SIMILAR CONCERN ABOUT THE BERNAL CANDIDACY.

-- ON THE EVENING OF MARCH 28, THE SERVICE CHIEFS, GONZALES AND THE MINISTERS OF DEFENSE AND INTERIOR MET WITH BANZER FOR FIVE HOURS, PRIMARILY TO DISCUSS THE INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION. ALTHOUGH AFTER THAT SESSION INTERIOR MINISTER JIMENEZ TOLD REPORTERS THAT THERE WAS NO REASON TO ALTER THE ELECTORAL PROCESS, MANY SAVVY LOCAL OBSERVERS CONCLUDED THAT THE CONFEREES HAD DECIDED EXACTLY THE OPPOSITE.

5. FROM INTELLIGENCE REPORTS AND OUR CONVERSATIONS WITH THE KEY ACTORS, MEMBERS OF PEREDA'S CAMPAIGN, AND OPPOSITION ELEMENTS, WE BELIEVE THAT BANZER MAY INDEED BE LEANING TOWARD CANCELLING OR POSTPONING ELECTIONS, BUT WILL NOT DO SO UNTIL HE HAS WON THE CONSENT OF THE ARMED FORCES. AT THE COMMANDERS' MEETING SCHEDULED FOR APRIL 3, WE UNDERSTAND BANZER WILL PRESENT A NUMBER OF ALTERNATIVES. THESE WILL PROBABLY INCLUDE AN OPTION FOR CONTINUING WITH AND STRENGTHENING THE PEREDA CANDIDACY, ONE CONFIDENTIAL

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FOR MAINTAINING THE ELECTION TIMETABLE BUT DROPPING PEREDA IN FAVOR OF ANOTHER (PERHAPS CIVILIAN) CANDIDATE, AND OPTIONS FOR CANCELLING OR POSTPOINING THE PROCESS.

6. BANZER HAS RECENTLY TOLD THE AMBASSADOR AND, WE UNDERSTAND, PEREDA THAT HE FAVORS CONTINUING THE CURRENT ELECTORAL SCHEME BUT THAT HE MUST CONVINCE THE ARMED FORCES. ONE INFLUENTIAL PEREDA LIEUTENANT HAS TOLD UFNK HOWEVER, THAT PEREDA AND HIS BACKERS FEAR BANZER WILL STACK THE CARDS AGAINST THE CURRENT PROCESS, COMING DOWN FOR THE OPTION THAT HE THINKS WILL BEST SECURE HIS OWN POSITION IN POWER. ACCORDING TO THIS SOURCE, PEREDA'S ADVISORS HAVE BEEN STRUGGLING HARD ON TWO FRONTS. FIRST, THEY HAVE BEEN TRYING TO CONVINCE PEREDA THAT THERE IS STILL TIME TO WRENCH THE PROCESS BACK ON COURSE, AND THAT HE SHOULD NOT THROW IN THE TOWEL. SECOND, THEY HAVE BEEN TRYING TO "PIN BANZER TO THE WALL" AND LIMIT HIS CHANCES TO RENEGE ON BOTH ELECTIONS AND PEREDA. THIS IS WHAT WAS BEHIND THE UNP AD CLAIMING SOLIDARITY WITH BANZER AND DEMOCRACY.

7. OUR VIEW TENDS TO COINCIDE WITH THAT OF THE PEREDA LIEUTENANT'S., WE BELIEVE THAT PEREDA WAS DEEPLY HUMILATED AT BEING CAUGHT OFF GUARD BY BOLIVIA'S DECISION TO RUPTURE TIES WITH CHILE (THE DAY BEFORE IT WAS ANNOUNCED HE WAS NQITED AS FAVORING A CONTINUATION OF RELATIONS), AND THAT AS

A RESULT THE GROWING GULF BETWEEN PEREDA AND BANZER WIDENED. AS NANZER BEGAN TO LEAN AWAY FROM THE PEREDA CANDIDACY, PEREDA, PUSHED BY HIS ADVISORS, HAS APPARENTLY BEEN PERSUADED THAT HIS ONLY HOPE LAY IN FORCING BANZER TO RESPOND TO HIS PUBLIC COMMITMENTS. IN THIS CONTEXT, WE SEE BANZER'S CONTENTION THAT HE WILL NOT BE A CADIDATE AS MERELY AN EFFORT TO KEEP HIS OPTIONS OPEN. WE NOTE THAT, IN THIS COMMUNIQUE, THERE WAS NO FRESH COMMITMENT TO MAINTAINING THE ELECTORAL TIMETABLE. AT THE SAME TIME, ALTHOUGH OPPORTUNITIES HAVE
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PRESENTED THEMSELVES, BANZER HAS NOT ATTEMPTED RECENTLY TO RECONFIRM HIS FAITH IN JUAN PEREDA OR THE JULY ELECTNINS. THUS, THE BATTLE BETWEEN THE PEREDA AND BANZER FORCES HAS BEEN JOINED., GIVEN BANZER'S TRACK RECORD, HOWEVER, MUST CONCLUDE THAT THE STRUGGLE IS UNEQUAL. THE ODDS ARE THAT THE PEREDA CANDIDACY--AND PERHAPS THE ELECTORAL TIMETABLE-- WILL BE DUMPED AT THE APRIL 3 COMMANDERS' CONCLAVE.
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